

## Barnes, Edlynzia

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**From:** Schardt, James  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 2, 2019 1:50 PM  
**To:** Korleski, Christopher; Jaffess, Sharon; Tuchman, Marc  
**Cc:** Schardt, James; Barnes, Edlynzia  
**Subject:** mention of Administrator/Minister meeting in the Great Lakes in Detroit News article...

See highlight below...

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2019/04/02/wheeler-pledges-support-great-lakes-clean-up/3340576002/>

EPA head supports Trump on 'fully funding' Great Lakes program

Washington — The head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says he "fully supports" President Donald Trump's decision to abandon cuts to a popular Great Lakes cleanup program, despite his proposal last month to reduce its budget by 90 percent.

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler's commitment came under questioning Tuesday by Rep. David Joyce of Ohio, the top Republican on the House Appropriations subcommittee, where Wheeler was testifying.

"I love the Great Lakes and completely agree with President Trump last week when he announced we'll fully fund the Great Lakes initiative," Wheeler told lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

"This is something we take very seriously, I take very seriously, the president takes very seriously. We're working to see how we can continue the progress of cleaning up the Great Lakes."

Wheeler's statement is a turnaround from a month ago, when the EPA released its budget and proposed reducing funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative from \$300 million a year to \$30 million.

It was the third year in a row that the Trump administration had proposed zeroing out or slashing money for the program, which enjoys bipartisan support in Congress and helps monitor and fight invasive species, clean up toxic substances and restore habitats.

The reversal came after Trump told supporters at a Grand Rapids campaign rally Thursday that he would fully fund the program. Three Michigan GOP lawmakers had urged Trump to restore funding during the car ride en route to the rally.

"I support the Great Lakes," Trump said during the rally. "They're beautiful. They're big, very deep. Record deepness, right?"

Wheeler, who is from Ohio, said he believes he's the only EPA administrator in the agency's history who "goes swimming in the Great Lakes."

He noted he has visited the Great Lakes area of Michigan as administrator and said his agency is doing "some tremendous work" there with the state Department of Environmental Quality.

Wheeler also noted he spoke with Canadian Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna while at the G-7 Environment Ministerial Meeting in September in Halifax "about what we can do jointly help improve the quality of the health of the Great Lakes."

"She and I intend to visit the Great Lakes together. We're looking at where we can visit, both in the U.S. and Canada on the same day, to see some of the initiatives that we're doing to clean up the Great Lakes," Wheeler said.

Joyce welcomed the EPA leader's comments but pressed him on what the administration's desired budget is for the program, in light of Trump's announcement.

"The actual dollar amount is \$300 million, and it's my understanding — we've been talking to (the White House budget office) over the last couple days about submitting an additional request to Congress to cover that amount," Wheeler said.

"So it's safe to say, we're likely to see an addendum?" Joyce said, asking where the additional \$270 million would come from.

"We're certainly going to follow the president's direction on that," Wheeler said.

Rep. Brenda Lawrence, D-Southfield, asked Wheeler how close his agency is to designating PFAS chemicals as hazardous substances under the Superfund program and what's preventing the EPA from moving more quickly.

Michigan is a national hot spot for contamination by PFAS, which refers to a large class of chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances used to make furniture, paper packaging for food and cookware resistant to water, grease or stains.

"Congress has asked you to list them," Lawrence said.

Wheeler indicated the agency "just started" the process of listing PFAS as hazardous, "so that is going to take a little bit of time."

"But we are looking at PFOS and PFOA under all our different statutes and all of our authorities," said Wheeler, referring to two well-known PFAS compounds.

"What I want to reassure the public is that we are currently enforcing our 70 parts per trillion drinking water (advisory standard) around the country," he added.

"We've taken eight enforcement actions, and we've assisted states in dozens of other enforcement actions, so where we find PFOS, PFOA and it's a problem for the drinking water, we step in and make sure the water is cleaned up and that Americans have clean, safe drinking water."

Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minnesota, noted reports that the Department of Defense is seeking a lower cleanup standard for PFAS contamination than the 70 ppt.

"We prefer the EPA to stand strong and tell the DOD we are not weakening standards for military bases or military service men and women and their families who live on those bases," said McCollum, who is vice chair of the Defense Subcommittee.

Lawrence also raised the issue of "millions" of dollars for drinking water programs "sitting around," including funding for EPA grants for lead testing in schools and for small and disadvantaged communities.

She asked Wheeler for his agency's plan to ensure the money is distributed.

Wheeler said the EPA would be announcing allocations in the coming weeks for the lead testing and for small and disadvantaged communities.

"As you noted, these are new programs, so we're a little slower in getting them off the ground," Wheeler said.

Rep. Mike Quigley, D-Illinois, asked Wheeler to address the lag in hiring staff to replace 120 engineers and scientists lost to attrition and retirement since 2017 in the agency's Region 5, which includes Michigan.

Quigley noted the EPA had funding available to replace staff in Region 5 and other regions, but as of Tuesday had not replaced 20 percent of the staff lost in fiscal 2018, Quigley noted.

"What steps will you take to speed up the hiring in each region?" he asked.

"Congressman, I will tell you that we are trying. We have some serious workforce challenges," Wheeler said, noting the agency had just hired a new human resources director.

Wheeler said 40 percent of the agency workforce is eligible to retire in the next five years.

"We are trying to hire up, but we are also losing people at a very fast rate," he said. "We're hiring people as fast as we're losing people. We're trying to address this."

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